



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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HEALTH NOTES.

BY H. LAING GORDON, M.D.

THE DREAMS OF CHILDREN.

THERE are few of us who have not a vivid recollection of having during childhood at one time or another hastily summoned our parents or our nurses to our side in the early hours of the night with piercing and heart-rending shrieks; and most of us, who are parents, remember rushing frantically upstairs to our children, convinced from the sounds that something very dreadful was happening. And after all in each case it turned out that the child had "only had a bad dream." There are many curious ideas abroad concerning the dreams of children, and it may be well to dissipate some of them by stating a few facts.

Dr. Leonard Guthrie has carefully studied this subject, and we are indebted to him for a very careful analysis of the causes of the dreams and "night terrors" of children, and for a most interesting account of the conditions usually found in connection with them.

In the first place, it is to be noted that the "bad dreams" of children very often have a physical cause, and may occur in children who are only temporarily out of health. It is, of course, the place of the parent to see that the cause of the temporary ill-health is detected before permanent damage is done. When we learn that the causes may be as simple as a deficiency of oxygen in the sleeping apartment, or "heavy bed-clothes and the custom of tucking children up in bed so that they cannot freely move their limbs," and sometimes, but happily not very often, as serious as growths in the throat and hip-joint disease, we may understand that this detection is very often beyond the power of the parent himself or herself. The nurse, it may be pointed out, as a rule pays little attention to the child's night terrors, and too often smacks him for screaming and disturbing her own

slumbers, thus adding a new terror to the child's sufferings; but even if she be a little more sympathetic she is pretty sure to jump to the conclusion that the dreams are due to "gormandizing" and that the fitting cure is the cutting off sugar and spice and all that's nice from the diet of the child. Dr. Guthrie is inclined to think that digestive derangement is not a common cause of "bad dreams"—certainly not so common as is generally supposed.

There are however many cases in which there is no evident physical cause for the bad dream, and such children are usually what is called "neurotic"; and the neurotic children who are especially prone to bad dreams are the "timid, shy, and self-conscious children." These children require very careful management; if misunderstood they may become the subjects of "highly imaginative superstition or worse still of melancholy and discontent," leading sometimes to apparently serious moral offences.

"Not long ago," says Dr. Guthrie, "I heard of a lady who in her desire that her children should learn nothing but what is true, banished fairy tales from her nursery. But her children evolved from their own imaginations fictions which were so appalling that she was glad to divert them with Jack the Giant Killer. Doubtless nervous and highly imaginative children are more liable to aggravated and oft repeated night terrors than those who are placid and commonplace. Little Ned who 'when sent to bed, went without a noise,' was probably as stolid as he was healthy, whilst 'the young Augustus Edward who reluctantly went bedward' had excellent reasons for his reluctance."

Dr. Guthrie asserts that the character of the dreamer is of more importance than that of the dream, but at the same time he points out that we often have light thrown upon the cause of the dream by enquiring into its nature and contents. At the same time this is not always easy, because as we know more dreams are forgotten than are remembered; we would point out, however, that the nurse or parent sensible enough to treat the acute symptoms of the dream and the resulting terror by judicious sympathy, would be well advised

in endeavouring to extract some account of the black dog or figure of Euclid or other tormenting horror; and probably to talk it over by the turned-up gas light and with the mother, converting the terror into laughter, is the most appropriate and comforting treatment for the attacks themselves.

Charles Lamb was a sufferer from night terrors, and Dr. Guthrie recalls what the essayist has to say on the subject in his *Witches and other night-fears*. Lamb denounces the habit of leaving timid and imaginative children alone to go to sleep in the dark, when the darkness is a source of terror to them. A simple night light is all that is required in such cases. Dr. Guthrie relates the case of a child who when told she need not fear the darkness because "God would be with her," replied with innocent profanity, "I wish you'd take God away and leave the candle."

The chief lesson pointed out by Dr. Guthrie's monograph on this subject is that the cause of bad dreams should always be found, otherwise evil developments may ensue. And the natural conclusion for us as parents is that children should be treated sympathetically, never harshly, when they have night terrors or bad dreams or nightmares.

OUR WORK.

Conference.—The Annual Conference will be held on May 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th, at St. Martin's Town Hall, Charing Cross. For full particulars see advertisements, pages iv. and v. Local Secretaries are requested to note these dates.

The Seventh Annual Natural History Exhibition will be held during the Conference. Contributions of Nature Note-books, Drawings, Collections and other suitable exhibits are invited from adults as well as from children. A lecture to children will be given on one afternoon at the exhibition. All particulars as to place and date when exhibits should be sent, can be had on application to Mrs. Henry Perrin, 23, Holland Villas Road, London, W.

Aunt Mai "at home" to her nephews and nieces, May 12th, at 50, Porchester Terrace, W.

HOUSE OF EDUCATION.

Report on the Nature Note Books, December, 1899.

CLASS I.

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| 1. M. D. RYAN | 2. M. F. EVANS |
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CLASS II.

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| 3. E. M. SPEARMAN | 6. A. M. NEILD |
| 4. B. WINGATE | 7. M. STRACHAN |
| 5. D. NESBITT | |

CLASS III.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 8. O. CLARK | 11. L. M. CONDER |
| 9. L. C. FAUNCE | 12. M. HUGHES-JONES |
| 10. D. TETLEY | |

I have received twelve books for the year, which are placed as above. This can hardly be considered a "strong year" in Nature Note Books. Miss Ryan's book would probably have been full, but for illness at the most important season. Miss Evans has painted successfully white flowers on white paper, without either hard outline or shaded back-ground. Miss Strachan has a number of good and careful observations on birds. The lecture notes are many of them very full and very well expressed, and the phonetic spelling, which has in some years disfigured the books, is almost entirely absent, and the books all show progress as the work proceeds.

28th February, 1900.

HERBERT D. GELDART.

The following students have obtained the Diploma of the National Health Society:—G. M. Bradley, M. M. Kerr, E. S. Mence, E. M. Saunders, A. S. Gordon, K. H. Hammond, E. Rossiter, F. White, J. Sergeant, G. F. K. Wilkinson, C. B. Huston, E. Smith, E. Persse.

Parents' Review School.—The examination papers will be sent out for Monday, April 2nd. The summer term begins Monday, April 30th.